
The Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study – Preface

The Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort study (MoBa) is a longitudinal pregnancy cohort conducted by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. Now, in 2014, it is 15 years since the data collection started. However, back in 1999, many of the enthusiasts who made the cohort come to life had struggled for years. The first part of this special issue tells the stories of how MoBa was initiated and planned from the early 1990s. Perinatal epidemiologists located in Bergen and Oslo wanted to include more information on factors that pregnant women were exposed to. At the same time, the concept of the fetal origins of chronic diseases was launched. The empirical basis for the concept was not impressive. Pregnancy cohorts can provide this basis, although MoBa's scientific founding fathers and mothers might not live to see the final answers. Establishing a cohort with such a long term perspective requires patience and optimism. It was not until 2006 that the first publications from the cohort appeared.

The first papers in this issue reflect the struggle to pass hurdles. The financial basis for MoBa was difficult to establish, some professional groups were skeptical and issues of privacy and autonomy were debated. The value of etiological research was, however, easily understood by many pregnant women, and by their caretaking midwives and obstetricians. This understanding was perhaps also reflected in the support given by the Norwegian Parliament in 1998. International support from strong research groups turned out to be very helpful. We thank the many pioneers for their endurance, and for their contributions to this issue of the Norwegian Journal of Epidemiology.

The second part consists of papers that review important topics. Some also provide original data analyses. And, although the hypothesis of the fetal origin of adult disease has not yet been tested, a series of interesting findings are presented that concern diseases in pregnancy and early childhood, as well as consequences of certain exposures. About 300 scientific papers have now been published based on MoBa data (www.fhi.no/moba-en), and only some of them are referred to here. The results and ideas for future studies presented in this issue will hopefully inspire others to take a closer look at the MoBa resources for new projects.

MoBa is young. The data collection is ongoing with long-term follow-up planned for all active participants. At present, new questionnaires for 13-year old children and their parents are being planned. The causes of many diseases are still unknown. For most disorders, we do not understand how genes and environmental factors work together in different periods of life. We are dedicated to provide data to Norwegian and international researchers that have specific problems they want to pursue. This is an obligation to the participants that give detailed and personal information to us.

Many people have contributed along the MoBa journey, and most of them are still involved in research and management today. We gratefully acknowledge all their work, and the efforts they have done in preparing papers here. Also, we acknowledge the work done by the reviewers listed at the end of this issue. However, without the participating families there would have been no research.

The guest editors



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